

## **Latest update from the 8 English LA Led Pilots**

### **Bath & North East Somerset Council**

#### **Update**

Bath continues to highlight the changes that could affect people when Universal Credit starts to be implemented to Support Workers and Housing Associations. They attended events held by the largest local Housing Association and explained UC changes directly to tenants. They also visited a family centre and spoke to Family Support Officers who have close dealings with families), to discuss UC, and the changes that this will bring. And have also engaged with Women's Services and identified access to a further 8 self-serve PCs at the Women's' Services office.

Bath is starting to arrange Jobcentre / Bath and North East Somerset Work Exchange Experiences where staff from both organisations can spend half a day looking at the work that each other do. It is expected that this will strengthen expertise, such as employability, for Local Authority staff.

Communications have started with libraries to explore the impact that digital by default will have on their self-serve PC's when UC launches, and where people can be signposted to, should they need any further help and /or support.

Work has recently started with The Universal Credit Programme on the Personal Planner to help understand how this can be linked to local partner organisations.

Emerging themes from current evaluation are that although many people can claim, lack of digital access and terminology could deter people. People are concerned about completing an 'official' on-line application form. Also, although external partners are highlighted to customers for various degrees of help/support, this isn't always taken up. Further work is under way to identify the reasons for this.

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**Birmingham City Council**

**Update**

In Birmingham, 50% of people attending letting suites did not have an email address, as a result this involved more time being spent with tenants helping them to set up this first account before giving access to the log book. In order to address this, the floorwalkers are being given tablets so that they can reduce the time the main letting suite computers are utilised to try and reduce the backlog of tenants waiting to sign up.

At the start of the process people were asked whether they wanted to sign-up to the log book, by giving people this option most automatically decide not to. So now the process has changed to make it a requirement by including the log book in the process of obtaining their tenancy and using appropriate language which has resulted in them signing up.

Channel Shift to Self Serve - Up to date (91%) of new tenants completed their Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit form via Self Serve on line application through digital log book, (6.5%) didn't complete due to process issues which were not being adhered to and so we are sure that this will increase and (2.5%) were unable to complete due to learning difficulties or rules imposed on people who are on probation not being able to have access to the internet.

As part of the letting suite process an income maximisation and financial assessment is undertaken. So far 1874 people have been through the letting suite process and over 8.5m worth of benefits have been identified which equates to approximately £12.50 per week for everyone who has gone through the process. The majority of benefit £6.5 m was housing benefit with £1m Council Tax Benefit and £1.5m other benefits.

<b>London Borough of Lewisham</b>
<b>Update</b>
<p>Lewisham has now made initial contact with all 524 families who are the focus of the pilot. 250 have been taken through the triage process. Of those:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>109 were triaged either as exempt, no longer affected by the benefit cap or not vulnerable</li><li>125 were booked for Face to face appointments</li><li>16 were temporarily put on hold pending an interpreter being booked.</li></ul> <p>The pilot team have been working with the Cabinet Office 'nudge' team to identify ways to make contact with those families they have been unsuccessful with to date.</p> <p>They have started to generate some useful learning in terms of vulnerabilities identified at the triage assessment and how this translates into structured support focused discussions. Some examples of recent learning are:</p> <p>Lewisham are compiling results of support planning. Of the support plans: 67% provide advice on an identified housing need, 62% refer to an employment support provider, 39% give advice on getting online and 37% make referrals for budgeting and debt advice.</p> <p>Exit surveys demonstrate that the approach is helping to address knowledge and skills gaps around the transition:</p> <p>83% said they knew nothing about UC and the benefit cap before their appointment. After their appointment, 91% said they think they know all or most of what they need to know about the changes, 80% said they were more likely to work following the results of our better off calculator and 76% said they were personally committed to achieving all of the things in their support plans.</p> <p>One particular learning point has been associated with developing a more intensive complex needs support service for residents who are likely to need a more on-going relationship with the local authority during the transition to Universal Credit. The local authority is considering how it might approach the development of this service alongside pilot activities.</p>

<b>Melton Borough Council</b>
<b>Update</b>
<p>Using customer insight, Melton has been developing an engagement plan to ensure that customers are fully informed regarding the Welfare Reform changes. Customers have been targeted by phone and letter, as well as at February's Town Forum event. The effectiveness of this approach will be tested initially with the implementation of Melton's first on-line service – the Council Tax Support Service, which will be rolled out from 22 April. Response to this service will provide some early feedback on how successful the engagement plan has been in raising customer awareness.</p> <p>The council's Employment and Skills Worker continues to provide support to the most vulnerable individuals, providing low level or intense support depending on the customer's circumstances.</p>

Currently the majority of referrals are from council staff and Melton is therefore looking for ways of promoting the service and raise awareness with partners, particularly through the Partnership Delivery Group.

Jobcentre Plus and Melton are working jointly to deliver a triage service for Lone Parent New Joiners from two of its Children's Centres in the borough. The new service will be launched on 8 April and will test the benefits of delivering this type of service jointly to customers.

A number of early lessons are beginning to emerge from the pilot including:

Many of the most vulnerable claimants with complex needs are often difficult to reach and interactions with these claimants tend to be resource intensive as one to one engagement appears more successful.

A high percentage of claimants have on line access but this is through devices such as mobile phones and therefore unsuitable for completing an on-line claim.

There is a need to provide free/low cost internet access at a variety of locations to meet customer demand. Library sessions are inadequate both in length and availability.

#### **North Dorset District Council**

##### **Update**

Spectrum, a housing association within the consortium, are more strongly encouraging their tenants and potential tenants to take up financial training courses and access to the courses has also been expanded to those under occupying properties. Review sessions have been held and feedback from tenants evaluated. The courses have been reworked to take account of the feedback. Generally feedback from the sessions has been good. Continuous evaluation will be undertaken by Adult Learning (the provider) who has confirmed that they have funding available to continue provision of these courses.

North Dorset are providing mediated support for the completion of on line housing benefit claim forms and have been measuring both ability and length of time this takes. This has resulted in a re-design of the Housing Benefit form to make it easier to complete. IT literate applicants are now averaging 32 minutes to complete the form (previously 43 minutes).

They are also investigating the possibility of training volunteers to help complete the Housing Benefit application from other more remote public access points. This is important where IT literacy is low. It is crucial to provide public access points when broadband are not available in some of the remote areas of the District. The volunteers will need to be CRB checked and sign a confidentiality clause.

**Oxford City Council**

**Update**

Oxford has spent the vast majority of March dealing with the impact of notifying customers in its area about the under-occupancy size restrictions. There have been a vast number of queries from customers in response to correspondence covering a range of issues.

They are now refining the triage process based on experiences to date, as the next step is to start pro-actively contacting customers affected by the under-occupancy size restrictions who have not contacted the Council in response to letters.

High interest / requests for personal budgeting support were anticipated, but this has not materialised at this time. It was also expected that Housing / security of tenure would be a barrier to work due to the customers targeted and the challenges they face as the Welfare Reforms take effect. The high volume of Housing related issues has resulted in them attempting to recruit additional resource for the Pilot to deal with these issues effectively.

Oxford have provided additional support to 74 customers who have been referred to the pilot, conducted 14 face to face interviews and have made 22 referrals to other agencies on behalf of customers.

Early learning has indicated that the most common barriers to work within the customer group are:

- Debt
- Perceived lack of employability
- Housing / security of tenure

**Rushcliffe Borough Council**

**Update**

Building effective partnerships continues to be an important element in Rushcliffe's approach to delivering an improved customer service from its Contact Centre at West Bridgford. Agreement has been reached with Citizens Advice that they will begin to offer a service from the Centre from 1 April. Engagement is continuing with other partners with the aim of strengthening relationships and refining service delivery plans. Rushcliffe will be holding a Partnership Workshop, hopefully in June, to seek further opportunities for the partners to integrate their services. They will also be visiting the Wigan Life Centre in April to seek lessons learned from partner services delivery model.

Jobcentre Plus has developed a Delivery Plan which sets out the steps and timescales for gradually increasing JCP service provision at the Centre. This will enable JCP and Rushcliffe to work together to build and shape the service over coming months to ensure it best meets customer needs. This includes providing training to Council advisors so they can offer customer support when JCP are not on site.

The marketing campaign to encourage customers to use online methods wherever possible is well underway. A second marketing campaign aimed at promoting the many services offered by a variety of partners at the Centre will commence after Easter. Rushcliffe are also supporting

partners in delivering their own campaigns to advertise their specific service from the Centre.

The second pilot evaluation report was submitted this month and early lessons are beginning to emerge. For example:

Effective partnerships are key to success but take time to build. Data sharing amongst partners continues to be an issue that has been identified by both Rushcliffe and Jobcentre Plus as an obstacle to partnership working developing at pace.

Directing customers to on-line services can be seen as a difficult option for front line advisers, who are used to delivering a high quality face to face service to those visiting the centre. There is a desire amongst staff to continue to deliver the service in this way and a change in culture will be required which takes time to embed.

There is still a lack of awareness from those surveyed at the Centre that Universal Credit is coming and that it will bring changes for benefit customers.

#### **West Lindsey District Council**

##### **Update**

Without the on line HB form, there have been limits to work undertaken by the joint LA/DWP Ops team but it is anticipated that the form will be ready, for internal use only, during March with a view to placing on the council website once internal testing is complete.

Those that are coming into the Guildhall are being supported where necessary to complete JSA online and directed to Housing officers on the same site to complete Housing Benefit claims at the same time. The provision of the public access PCs has also provided support for those logging on to Universal Job Match and there have been many customers coming back regularly for this purpose. When questioned the vast majority of customers said that they welcomed the help and support provided at the early stage.

The Credit Union are soon to be based in the Guildhall too providing more of a one stop shop. Discussions are underway about verification of documents so that a bank account could be opened whilst the customer is in the Guildhall.

Partnerships are being developed and a working group set up. Meetings have been held with training providers and community link champions and a training session is planned for volunteers in early March. This will help to support the later phases in other parts of the District.